Shark Victim Surfer Girl's Simple Faith

Bethany Hamilton looks like any fun-loving young American teenager—bright eyed, smiling, excited about what she enjoys doing. She's athletic, attractive, trim, tanned and blonde—qualities that in this culture can open many doors.

But Bethany faces a special challenge that many her age do not. She is missing her left arm just below the shoulder, lost to a shark attack while surfing in Hawaii in the fall of 2003. The 1,500-pound tiger shark also chomped a huge chunk from her surfboard. She's fortunate to be alive.

Bethany, who lives on Kauai, was the state's top-ranked female amateur surfer before the attack. Such a loss might seem devastating. *USA Today* reports that Bethany seems undismayed. Merely three months after the mishap, she was surfing competitively again. She aims to be among the world's best surfers.

Rather than hiding her left arm under clothing, she displays it in tank tops and calls it "Stumpy." When her prosthetic turned out to be too light in color to match her suntan, she nicknamed it Haole Girl, slang for a non-Hawaiian. She peels tangerines by holding them between her feet and using her right hand.

How to account for her bright spirits? Determination and dedication seem part of her makeup. But is there something more?

Her dad gives a clue. "She's not suffering," Tom Hamilton told the newspaper. "Somehow God gave Bethany an amazing amount of grace in this. I am in awe. She never says, 'Why me?'"

Bethany confirms her father's analysis: "This was God's plan

for my life, and I’m going to go with it… I might not be here if I hadn’t asked for God’s help.”

This surfer girl’s simple faith astounds observers. She has become a media darling—with TV appearances on Oprah, 20/20 and Good Morning America. Book and movie offers have come. She threw out the first pitch for baseball’s Oakland Athletics on opening day. Through it all, her family ties remain strong.

Her optimism echoes that of an early follower of Jesus, Paul, whose life-experience log included unjust imprisonments, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks and social ostracism. He was convinced that “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love” Him.

Life can throw many curve balls: serious illness, accidents, terrorism, domestic strife, employment hassles, theft and more. Answers to “Why me?” and “What to do?” are often complex. Accompanying feelings of fear, confusion, grief or despair should not be ignored or minimized.

But perhaps a perspective that includes God in the picture can be a starting place for coping. Maybe the surfer girl’s belief and trust have something valuable to say to a society filled with pain and risk.

During a winter New York City media tour, Bethany spontaneously gave her ski jacket to a homeless girl sitting on a Times Square subway grate, then called off a shopping spree, citing her own material abundance.

Something very significant is happening in this young athlete’s life. Watch for more.

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Cool Stuff About Love and Sex

Hey, kids. Want to read some cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your folks? Hey, parents. Want to learn how to communicate with your kids about these important topics? Read on!

This article is also available in Spanish. 

Cool Stuff

Psst! Hey, kids! Want to hear some really cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your parents? Listen up! (But . . . how about closing your ears for the next few seconds?)

Hey, parents! Want to learn how to talk to your kids about sex in a way they will understand and relate to? Keep listening.{1}

OK, kids. You can listen again.

“A fulfilling love life. How can I have one? How can I get the most out of sex?” University students worldwide ask these questions. As I’ve spoken on their campuses, I’ve tried to offer some practical principles because I believe both pleasure and emotional fulfillment are important facets of sex. These principles relate to teens, too. Teens of all ages.

Sex is often on our minds. According to two psychologists at the universities of Vermont and South Carolina, 95% of people think about sex at least once each day.{2} You might wonder, “You mean that 5% of the people *don’t*?”

Why does sex exist? One of the main purposes of sex is pleasure. Consider what one wise man named Solomon wrote. Writing sometimes in “PG” (but not “R-rated”) terms, he said:

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
Be exhilarated always with her love.{3}

Solomon's ancient love sonnet, the "Song of Solomon," is one of the best sex manuals ever written. It traces the beauty of a sexual relationship in marriage and is an openly frank description of marital sexual intimacy. You might want to read it yourself. (Would it surprise you to know that it's in the Bible? You can dog-ear the good parts.)

Another purpose of sex is to develop oneness or unity. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, Moses, the great Israeli liberator, wrote, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."{4} When two people unite sexually, they "become one flesh."

A third purpose for sex is procreation. That, of course, is how we all got here. You learn that in first year biology, right?

OK, so sex is for pleasure, unity, and procreation. But how can people get the most out of love and sex?

How to Have a Most Fulfilling Love Life

One way not to have a fulfilling love life in marriage is to concentrate solely on sexual technique. There is certainly nothing wrong with learning sexual technique—especially the

basics—but technique by itself is not the answer.

The qualities that contribute to a successful sex life are the same ones that contribute to a successful interpersonal relationship. Qualities like love, commitment, and communication.

Consider love. As popular speaker and author Josh McDowell points out, those romantic words, "I love you," can be interpreted several different ways. One meaning is "I love you *if*—If you go out with me . . . if you are lighthearted . . . if you sleep with me." Another meaning is "I love you *because*—because you are attractive . . . strong . . . intelligent." Both types of love must be earned.

The best kind of love is unconditional. It says, "I love you, *period*. I love you even if someone better looking comes along, even if you change, even if you have zoo breath in the morning. I place your needs above my own."

One young engaged couple had popularity, intelligence, good looks, and athletic success that seemed to portend a bright future. Then the young woman suffered a skiing accident that left her paralyzed for life. Her fiancé deserted her.

This true story—portrayed in the popular film, "The Other Side of the Mountain"—was certainly complex. But was his love for her "love, period"? Or was it love "if" or love "because"? Unconditional love (or "less-conditional", because none of us is perfect) is an essential building block for a lasting relationship.

Unconditional love with caring and acceptance can help a sexual relationship in a marriage. Sex, viewed in this manner, becomes not a self-centered performance but a significant expression of mutual love.

Commitment is also important for a strong relationship and fulfilling sex. Without mutual commitment, neither spouse will

be able to have the maximum confidence that the relationship is secure.

Good communication is essential. If a problem arises, couples need to talk it out and forgive rather than stew in their juices. As one sociology professor expressed it, “Sexual foreplay involves the ’round-the-clock relationship.'”{5}

Why Wait?

After I’d spoken in a human sexuality class at Arizona State University, one student said, “You’re talking about sex within marriage. What about premarital sex?” He was right. I was saying that sexual intercourse is designed to work best in a happy marriage and recommending waiting until marriage before experiencing sex.

This view is, of course, very controversial. You may agree with me. Or you may think I am from another planet, and I respect your right to feel that way. Here’s why I waited.

First is a moral reason. According to the perspective I represent, the biblical God clearly says to wait.{6} Some people think that God wants to make them miserable. Actually, He loves us and wants our best. There are practical reasons for waiting.

Premarital sex can detract from a strong relationship and a fulfilling love life. Too often, it’s merely a self-gratifying experience. After an intimate sexual encounter, one partner might be saying, “I love you” while the other is thinking, “I love it.”

Very often premarital sex lacks total, permanent commitment. This can create insecurity. For instance, while the couple is unmarried, the nagging thought can persist, “If he or she has slept with me, whom else have they slept with?” After they marry, one might think, “If they were willing to break a

standard with me before we married, will they with someone else after we marry?" Doubt can chip away at their relationship.

Premarital sex can also inhibit communication. Each might wonder, "How do I compare with my lover's other partners? Does he or she tell them how I perform in bed?" Each may become less open; communication can deteriorate and so can the relationship. Premarital sex can lessen people's chances to experience maximum oneness and pleasure. I'm not claiming that premarital sex eliminates your chances for great sex in marriage. But I am saying that it can introduce factors that can be difficult to overcome.

A recently married young woman told me her perspective after a lecture at Sydney University in Australia. She said, "I really like what you said about waiting. My fiancé and I had to make the decision and we decided to wait." (Each had been sexually active in other previous relationships.) She continued: "With all the other tensions, decisions and stress of engagement, sex would have been just another worry. Waiting 'till our marriage before we had sex was the best decision we ever made."

Wise words. I waited because God said to, because there were many practical advantages, and because none of the arguments I heard for not waiting were strong enough.{7}

The Vital Dimension

So far we've looked at "Why sex?", "How to have a most fulfilling love life," and "Why wait?". Consider now the vital dimension in any relationship.

Powerful emotional factors can make it difficult for teens to wait until marriage for sexual intercourse or to stop having sex. A longing to be close to someone or a yearning to express love can generate intense desires for physical intimacy. Many

singles today want to wait but lack the inner strength or self esteem. They may fear losing love if they postpone sex.

Often sex brings emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it. As one TV producer told me, “Frankly, I think the sexual revolution has backfired in our faces. It’s degrading to be treated like a piece of meat.” The previous night her lover had justified his decision to sleep around by telling her, “There’s plenty of me for everyone.” What I suspect he meant was, “There’s plenty of everyone for me.” She felt betrayed and alone.

I explained to her and to her TV audience that sexuality also involves the spiritual. One wise spiritual teacher understood our loneliness and longings for love. He recognized human emotional needs for esteem, acceptance, and wholeness and offered a plan to meet them. His plan has helped people to become brand “new persons” inside.{8} He promised unconditional love to all who ask.{9} Once we know we’re loved and accepted, we can have greater security to be vulnerable in relationships and new inner strength to make wise choices for safe living.{10}

This teacher said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”{11} Millions attest to the safety and security He can provide in relationships. His name, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth. Though I had been a skeptic, I placed my faith in Him personally my freshman year in college. Through a simple heart attitude, I said, “Jesus, I believe you died and rose again for me. I ask you to enter my life, forgive me, and give me the new life you promised.” He forgave all my flaws—and there were (and are) many of those. He said His own death and resurrection—once I accepted His pardon—erased my guilt.{12} That was great news!

Marriage with Jesus involved can be like triangle with God at the apex and the two spouses at the bottom corners. As each partner grows closer to God, they also grow closer to each

other. Life doesn't become perfect, but God's friendship can bring a vital dimension to any relationship.

Parents and Kids

A nationwide survey of teens asked the question, "When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?" Forty-nine percent of teens responding said it was their parents. The next closest response was "Friends" (16 percent). Eleven percent said the media influenced their decisions about sex the most. Only 5 percent said it was their romantic partner.{13} Kids, lots of your peers think that it is important to consider how their parents feel about sex.

And teens feel that talking with their parents about sex can make important sexual decisions easier. In a subsequent national survey, teens overwhelmingly expressed that they could more easily postpone sexual activity and avoid getting pregnant if they could only talk about these matters more openly with their folks.{14}

But there's a problem. Too many parents are unaware how important what they think about sex is to their teens. Parents often think that their teenagers' friends are the strongest influence on their teen's decisions about sex. Yet teens don't consider their friends as being nearly as influential as parents think they are.{15}

And mom, you are really, really important!

A major report based on two University of Minnesota studies involving national data found that teens having close relationships with their mothers are more likely than teens lacking close relationships with their mothers to delay first intercourse. The report authors note, "previous studies have shown that mothers tend to have a greater influence than fathers on teens' sexual decision-making."{16}

What can a parent do to help their teens develop positive,

healthy sexual attitudes and behavior? Here are some ideas:

- Develop close, loving relationships with your kids from the time they are young.
- Model the types of behavior and attitudes you wish them to emulate.
- Listen to them and treat them with respect.
- Talk about sex, your own values, and why you hold them.
- Help your teen think through their life goals, including education, and how teenage sexual activity might affect their dreams.
- Discuss what types of media are appropriate for your son or daughter to consume.

Making sexual decisions can be hard for teens today. Parents and teens can help each other by becoming close friends and by communicating. It's not always easy, but the rewards can be significant.

Notes

1. Parts of this article are adapted from Rusty Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," Every Student's Choice, 1996 and Rusty Wright, "Safe Sex?", Cross & Crescent LXXXI:4, Winter 1994-95, pp. 19-21.
2. Kathleen Kelleher, "Entertaining Fantasies? Don't Worry, Everyone's Doing It," *Los Angeles Times,* August 15, 1995, E1. She cites Harold Leitenberg of the University of Vermont and Kris Henning, "now at the University of South Carolina Medical School".
3. Proverbs 5:15-19 NASB.
4. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
5. Emily Dale, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, 1975.
6. 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.
7. For a summary of arguments for premarital sex, with responses, see Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to

Love," op. cit.
8. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT.
9. John 3:16; 13:34-35; 17:20, 23, 26; 1 John 4:7-21, 5:14-15.
10. Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:16-24; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.
11. John 8:32 NASB.
12. Luke 24:44-47; Colossians 2:12-14.
13. "Faithful Nation: What American Adults and Teens Think About Faith, Morals, Religion, and Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, September 2001, p. 5; http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/keeping.pdf.
14. "With One Voice 2002: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, December 2002, pp. 2, 26, 27; http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/WOV2002_fulltext.pdf.
15. Ibid., pp. 2, 22-23.
16. "Teens' Closeness With Their Mothers Linked to Delay in Initiation of Sexual Activity, Study Says," Kaiser Daily Reproductive Health Report, September 5, 2002, http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/print_report.cfm?DR_ID=13275&dr_cat=2. The words quoted are those of the Kaiser Report summary of what the University of Minnesota research authors communicated.

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“How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?”

Did God create hell? If He did create it, then how can He be a loving God, yet send people to a place of eternal damnation?

Yes, God created hell. Matthew 25:41 suggests that it was originally prepared for the devil and his angels. But unregenerate human beings will also be cast there.

We must not try to separate God’s attributes from one another. God is love, but He is also holy, just and full of wrath against sin. Because of His great love for us, God has provided His Son as a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 3:16, etc.). Those who reject this sacrifice will not receive its benefits (including the forgiveness of sins). These will be justly punished by God for their sins, and the wages of sin is death. “Death” in the Bible carries the idea of separation. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). Spiritual death is the separation of a person from God (Ephesians 2:1-2). Eternal death (the Second Death, or Lake of Fire) is eternal separation from God.

I hope this helps.

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

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P.S. From Sue Bohlin:

We must also remember that God wants to save people He made in His image, and for whom Christ died, more than we want to be saved. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance. It’s not that a loving God SENDS people to hell, but that He sadly

allows people to experience the horrible consequences of their refusal to trust Him.

The Doctrine of Revelation: How God Reveals His Nature and His Will

Rick Wade considers how God reveals his nature and his will to mankind. He finds that God clearly speaks to us through His creation and through His thoughts communicated in special revelation (includes His spoken word, His written word, and His Son).

Revelation and the God Who Speaks

Some years ago the pastor of the church I attended was on a nationally syndicated radio program with another pastor of a more liberal bent. They were discussing differences of understanding about Christianity, one of which was the nature of the Bible. My pastor asserted that Scripture is the inspired, revealed Word of God. The other pastor disagreed, saying that the Bible is a collection of the religious reflections of a particular group of people. Since it was a call-in program, I phoned at that point and asked the question, "If the Bible is just the religious ideas of a group of people and isn't from God, how can we know whether what *we* think is true Christianity is what *God* thinks it is?" The pastor said something about how we have other ways of knowing truth, and the program ended. Not a very satisfying answer.

The issue being dealt with was the nature of Scripture. Is it the religious reflection of sincere people expressing truth

about God the best they can? Or is it the revealed word of God?

In another article I dealt with the matter of the inspiration of Scripture. In this article I want to look at the doctrine of revelation. Not the *book*, Revelation, at the end of the New Testament, but the *doctrine* of revelation.

Revelation: What makes the Bible more than just religious writings

What *is* revelation? New Testament scholar Leon Morris quotes *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.* Revelation, it says, is "'The disclosure of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency', and secondly, 'Something disclosed or made known by divine or supernatural means.'" Says Morris:

> *Theologians might hesitate over this concentration on knowledge, for some of them would certainly prefer to define revelation in terms of the disclosure of a person. But the point on which we fasten our attention is the word 'disclosure'. Revelation is not concerned with knowledge we once had but have forgotten for the time being. Nor does it refer to the kind of knowledge that we might attain by diligent research. It is knowledge that comes to us from outside ourselves and beyond our own ability to discover.{1}*

Thus, revelation is knowledge we can have no other way than by being told.

Here one might ask the question, Does it make sense to think God might reveal Himself? What we see in Scripture is a God Who speaks. God walked and talked with Adam in the "cool of the day" (Gen. 2:8ff). Later, He spoke to Abraham and then to the prophets of Israel. In the Incarnation of Christ He spoke directly, as man to man, face to face. Along the way He

inspired His prophets and apostles to write His words to man.

This makes perfect sense. First, we know things in keeping with their nature. So, for example, we know the color of something by looking at it. We know distances by measuring. We know love by the good it produces. Along the same lines, we know persons by what they reveal about themselves. God is a Person, and there are things we can only know about Him if He tells us Himself. Second, God is transcendent, high above us. We cannot know Him unless He condescends to speak to us. Third, since God created rational, communicative beings, the idea that He would communicate with them in a rational way is not unreasonable.

Today, people look here and there for answers to the big questions of life—some consciously looking for God, some just looking for any truth on which they can depend. The doctrine of revelation teaches us that rather than wait for us to find God, God has found us. And He has revealed Himself to us in words we can understand.

General Revelation

Revelation comes to us in two basic forms: general or natural revelation, and special revelation. Let’s look at the first of these.

Through what has been made

General revelation is God’s Word given through the created order. Everyone is exposed to general revelation just by virtue of living in and being part of creation. In Psalm 19 we read, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world” (vv. 1–4). This idea is reiterated in Romans 1 where

Paul writes, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (v. 20). Says Leon Morris, “A reverent contemplation of the physical universe with its order and design and beauty tells us not only that God is but also that God is a certain kind of God.”{2}

If God can be known through creation in general, then it’s reasonable to think He can be known through man himself in particular as part of the created order. God has left His imprint on those made in His image. Theologian Bruce Demarest follows John Calvin in his belief that we all have an immediate knowledge of God based on our being made in His image and on common grace.{3} Our own characteristics of personality, rationality and morality say something about God.

What can be known through general revelation

What do we know about God through general revelation? Demarest says that through nature we know that God is uncreated (Acts 17:24), the Creator (Acts 14:15), the Sustainer (Acts 14:16; 17:25), the universal Lord (Acts 17:24), self-sufficient (Acts 17:25), transcendent (Acts 17:24), immanent (Acts 17:26–27), eternal (Ps. 93:2), great (Ps. 8:3–4), majestic (Ps. 29:4), powerful (Ps. 29:4; Rom. 1:20), wise (Ps. 104:24), good (Acts 14:17), and righteous (Rom. 1:32); He has a sovereign will (Acts 17:26), has standards of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15), and should be worshiped (Acts 14:15;17:23).{4} Furthermore, we all have some knowledge of God’s morality through nature (Rom. 2:15).

Other religions

It is because of general revelation that other religions often contain some truth about God. Remember that Paul said everyone knows God exists through what He has made, but that this knowledge is suppressed by our unrighteousness. They

“exchanged the truth of God for a lie,” he said, “and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1: 25). Nonetheless, snippets of truth can be detected in non-Christian religions. “For example,” writes Bruce Demarest, “the Yoruba people of Nigeria have a name for God, ‘Osanobwa,’ that means ‘he who blesses and sustains the world.’ The Taro people, also of Nigeria, after a time of barrenness often call a baby girl ‘Nyambien,’ meaning ‘God is good.’ The Ibo people of Nigeria denote God as ‘Eze-elu,’ or ‘the King above.’ And the Mende people of Liberia designate God as the Chief, the King of all Kings.{5} The Gogo people of West Africa believe that Mulungu governs ‘the destiny of man sending rain and storm, well-being and famine, health or disease, peace or war. He is the Healer.’{6} The Yoruba people say that in the afterlife the person-soul, the Oli, will give account of itself before Olodumare the supreme God. Since, as anthropologists testify, these convictions appear to have been arrived at apart from Christian or Muslim teaching, they must derive from God’s universal general revelation in nature, providence, and the implanted moral law.”{7}

What can’t be known

If all this *can* be known through nature, is there anything that *can’t*? Yes there is. Although through nature we can know some things *about* God, we cannot know how to get to *know* God personally, how to find redemption and reconciliation. This is why there had to be *special* revelation.

Special Revelation

As I have noted, God has revealed Himself through nature, but through nature we cannot know how to be reconciled to God. God had to speak in a special way to tell us how we may be redeemed. “Special revelation is redemptive revelation,” says Carl Henry. “It publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself (OT) and that he has now fulfilled that

promise in the gift of his Son in whom all men are called to believe (NT). The gospel is news that the incarnate Logos has borne the sins of doomed men, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification. This is the fixed center of special redemptive revelation."{8}

Personal

What is the nature of special revelation? First we should note that it is the communication of one Person to other persons. It isn't simply a series of propositions setting forth a theological system. This is why special revelation finds its culmination in Jesus, for in Him we are confronted with the Person of God. We'll talk more about this later.

Verbal and Propositional

It has been the understanding of the church historically that God has spoken verbally to His creatures. Words have been exchanged; rational ideas have been put forward in understandable sentences. Not *all* revelation is easy to understand, of course. Meaning is sometimes shrouded in mystery. But important truths are made clear.

That God would reveal Himself through verbal revelation isn't surprising. First, He is a *Person*, and persons communicate with other persons with a desire to extend and receive information. Second, His clear desire is to make friends with us. He wants to restore us to a proper relationship with Him. It's hard to imagine a friendship between two people who don't communicate clearly with one another.

Implicit in this understanding of revelation is the belief that it contains propositional truths; that is, statements that are informative and have truth value.

This isn't to say the Bible is only propositions. Douglas Groothuis notes that it also contains questions, imperatives, requests, and exclamations. However, in the words of Carl

Henry: "Regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these [biblical] writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false."{9} So when Jeremiah says that God "has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm!" (32:17), we know that the image of God's "arm" speaks of His power active in His creation. The truth "God acts with power in His creation" is behind the imagery.

Modern ideas

In recent centuries, however, as confidence in man's reason overshadowed confidence in God's ability to communicate, the understanding of revelation has undergone change. Some hold that revelation is to be understood in terms of *personal encounter,* of God encountering people so as to leave them with a "liberating assurance. . . .This assurance – 'openness to the future', Bultmann called it – was equated with faith."{10} Such an encounter can come as a result of reading Scripture, but Scripture itself isn't the verbal revelation of God. Even in evangelical churches where the Bible is preached as God's Word written, people sometimes put more faith in their "relationship" with God than in what God has said. "Don't worry me with doctrine," is the attitude. "I just want to have a relationship with Jesus." It's fine to have a relationship with Jesus. But try to imagine a relationship between two people here on earth in which no information is exchanged.

Those who hold this view draw a line between the personal and the propositional as if they cannot mix. In his evaluation, J.I. Packer says that this is an absurd idea.

> *"Revelation is certainly more than the giving of theological information, but it is not and cannot be less. Personal friendship between God and man grows just as human friendships do – namely, through talking; and talking means making informative statements, and informative statements are*

> *propositions. . . . To say that revelation is non-propositional is actually to depersonalize it. . . . To maintain that we may know God without God actually speaking to us in words is really to deny that God is personal, or at any rate that knowing Him is a truly personal relationship."{11}*

Another idea about the Bible in particular which has become commonplace in liberal theology is that the Bible is the product of the inspired ideas of men (a "quickening of conscience"{12}) rather than truths inspired by God. If this were the case, however, one might expect the Bible to give hints that it is just the religious reflections of men. But the witness of Scripture throughout is that it is the message of God *from* God. Here we don't see men simply reflecting on life and the world and drawing conclusions about God. Rather, we're confronted by a God who steps into people's lives, speaking words of instruction or promise or condemnation.

Modes of Special Revelation

Special revelation has taken different forms: the spoken Word, the written Word, and the Word made flesh.

Spoken Word

In the Garden of Eden, God spoke to Adam directly. (Gen. 3:8ff) He spoke to Abraham (e.g. Gen. 12:1–3), to Moses (Ex. 3:4ff), and to many prophets of the nation of Israel following that. Amos said that God did nothing "without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. . . . The Lord has spoken," he said. "Who can but prophesy?" (3:7–8) Prophets were primarily forth-tellers, relaying God's Word to those for whom it was intended.{13}

Written word

God also had His prophets write down what He said. The

writings of Moses were kept in the Tabernacle (Dt. 31:24–26), read in the hearing of the Israelites (Dt. 31:11), and kept as references by future kings of Israel (Dt. 17:18ff). They are quoted throughout the OT (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; Mal.4:4). Joshua put his teachings of God's ordinances with "the book of the law of God" (Josh. 24:26), and Samuel did the same (1 Sam. 10:25). The writer of Chronicles spoke of those earlier writings (1 Chron. 29:29), and later, Daniel referred to these books (Dan. 9:2,6,11). Solomon's proverbs and songs are mentioned in 1 Kings 4:32. The writing of the New Testament took a much shorter time than the Old Testament, so we don't see generations down the line referring back to the writings of their fathers. But we do see Peter speaking of the writings of Paul (2 Pe. 3:15–16), and Paul referring (it appears) to Luke's writings in 1 Tim. 5:18.

Word made flesh

So God has spoken, and His words have been written down. The third mode is the Word made flesh. The writer of Hebrews says that, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . ." (1:1-2a) All God's will wasn't given at once; it came in portions at various times. J.I. Packer says, "Then, in New Testament times, just as all roads were said to lead to Rome, so all the diverse and seemingly divergent strands of Old Testament revelation were found to lead to Jesus Christ."{14}

Jesus has been the mediator of revelation since the beginning. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27) Peter says it was the Spirit of Christ who spoke through the Old Testament prophets. (1 Pe. 1:11) But these were God's words given through men. In the Incarnation we received the fullest expression of His word directly. Jesus was and is the Word made flesh. (John 1:1,14)

Jesus is the supreme revelation because He is one with the Father: He is God speaking. He spoke the words the Father taught Him. (John 12:49; 14:10), and He summed up his ministry with the phrase "I have given them your word." (John 17:14) Abraham Kuyper summed it up beautifully: "Christ does not argue, he *declares;* he does not demonstrate, he *shows* and *illustrates*; he does not analyze, but with enrapturing symbolism *unveils* the truth."{15}

But Jesus doesn't reveal God just in His words but also in His person – in His character and the way He lived. Says the late Bernard Ramm: "The attitudes, action, and dispositions of Christ so mirrored the divine nature that to have seen such in Christ is to have seen the reflection of the divine nature." He continues:

> *Christ's attitudes mirror the Father's attitudes; Christ's affections mirror the Father's affections; Christ's love mirrors the Father's love. Christ's impatience with unbelief is the divine impatience with unbelief. Christ's wrath upon hypocrisy is the divine wrath upon hypocrisy. Christ's tears over Jerusalem is the divine compassion over Jerusalem. Christ's judgment upon Jerusalem or upon the Pharisees is the divine judgment upon such hardness of heart and spiritual wickedness.{16}*

As the Son spoke the Word of the Father so clearly because He knows perfectly the mind of the Father, so He also reflected the character of the Father being of the same nature.

In Christ, also, we see revelation as *event.* He carried out the will of the Father, thus revealing things about the Father. The cross not only accomplished our redemption; it also demonstrated the love of God. Jesus revealed God's glory in changing the water to wine in Cana (John 2:11) and in His resurrection (Rom. 6:4).

The total redeeming work of Christ, therefore, revealed the

Father in word, in character, and in deed.

Modern Hurdles

There are a couple of ways modern thought has served to undermine our confidence in the Bible as the written revelation of God. One way has to do with the knowability of historical events; another with the final authority for truth.

First, the matter of history and knowledge. In the Enlightenment era, philosophers such as Ren Descartes taught that only those ideas that could be held without doubt could count as knowledge. This created a problem for Scripture, for its major doctrines were revealed through *historical events*, and the knowledge of history is open to doubt logically speaking. History is constantly changing. Because of such change, the different contexts of those living long ago and of the historian negatively affects the historian's ability to truly comprehend the past. At best, historical knowledge can only be probable. Religious ideas, on the other hand, seemed to be eternal; they are fixed and unchanging. It was believed that they could be known through reason better than through historical accounts. The classic statement of this position was made by the eighteenth century German, Gotthold Lessing, when he said, "The accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."{17} ("Accidental" means just the opposite of necessary; such things didn't logically have to happen as they did.)

Thus, biblical teachings were put on the side of probability, of opinion, rather than on the side of *knowledge*. Since it was thought that religious truths *ought* to be on the side of logical *certainty* and *knowledge*, people began to wonder whether the Bible could truly be the revelation of God.

The fact is, however, that we *can* know truth through historical texts; we find it there all the time. I *know* I was born in December of 1955 and that George Washington was our

first president – even though these truths aren't what we call logically *necessary*, such as with mathematical equations. Although historical knowledge as such doesn't give the rational certainty our Enlightenment forebears might have wanted, it doesn't have to in order to be counted as knowledge.{18} Knowledge doesn't *have* to be logically *necessary* in order to be *trustworthy*.{19} There is no reason God cannot make Himself known through the lives of people and nations, or that the historical records of that revelation cannot convey objective truth to subsequent generations.

Nonetheless, confidence in Scripture was weakened. Wherein shall our confidence lie, then, with respect to religious matters? If we can't know truth through historical accounts, but must rely on our own reason, our reason becomes supreme over Scripture. The authority for truth lies within us, not in the Bible.

This subjectivity is the second outgrowth of the Enlightenment that affects our understanding of revelation and the Bible. Now it is *I* who have final authority for what is true. For some people it is our *reason* that is supreme. The philosopher, Immanuel Kant, taught that God speaks through our reason, and our worship of Him consists in our proper moral behavior. For others it is our *feelings* that are supreme. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, put the emphasis on our feelings of dependence and of oneness with God. For him, to make Scripture authoritative was to elevate reason above faith, and that was unacceptable. Thus, one camp elevated *reason* and said that historical accounts (such as those in Scripture) cannot provide the certainty we require, while the other camp elevated *feeling* and rejected final confidence in Scripture as too much in keeping with reason. Both ways the Bible lost out.

The turn inward was accentuated by the philosophy of existentialism. This philosophy had an influence on Christian theology. Theologian Rudolph Bultmann was "the outstanding exponent of the amalgamation of theology and existentialism,"

according to Philip Edgecumbe Hughes. The Bible was stripped of the supernatural, leaving little at all to go by with respect to the person of Jesus. But this didn't matter since Bultmann's existentialism turned the focus inward on our individual experience of the encounter with God.

The influence of this shift is still felt today. For too many of us, our confidence rests in our *own* understanding of things with little regard for establishing a theological foundation by which to measure our experience. On the one hand we get confused by disagreements over doctrines, and on the other our society is telling us to find truth within ourselves. How often do we find Christians making their bottom line in any disagreement over Christian teaching or activity, "I just feel this is true (or right)"? Now, it's true we can focus so much on the propositional, doctrinal content of Christianity that it becomes lifeless. It does indeed engage us on the level of personal experience. But as one scholar notes, "What is at stake is the actual *truth* of the biblical witness; not in the first place its truth *for me* . . . but its truth as coming *from God.* . . . The objective character of Scripture as truth given by God comes before and validates my subjective experience of its truth."{20} If we make our individual selves and our experiences normative for our faith, Christianity will have as many different faces as there are Christians! Our personal predilections and interests will become the substance of our faith. Any unity among us will be unity of *experience* rather than unity of the *faith.*

In response to the subjective turn of thinking, we hold that *reason* is insufficient as the source of knowledge of God. We could not know of such doctrines as the Incarnation and the Trinity unless God told us. Likewise, making *feelings* the final authority is death for theology, for there is no way to judge between personal experiences unless there is an objective authority. We have the needed authority in the revealed Word of God. Because we *can* know objective truth

about God, we needn’t look within ourselves to discover truth.

One final point. God has revealed Himself for a reason, that we might know Him and His desires and ways. We can have confidence that the Holy Spirit, Who inspired the writing of Scripture, has also been able to preserve it through the centuries so as to provide us with the same truth He provided those in ancient times.

God has spoken, through general revelation and special. We can know Him and His truth.

Notes

1. Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 10-11.
2. Morris, 33.
3. Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 51.
4. Demarest, 242-243.
5. Warren Lewis, ed., *Global Congress of World Religions* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Unification Theological Seminary, 1978), 126.
6. Bolaji Idowe, *African Traditional Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), 151. Quoted in Demarest, 243.
7. Demarest, 243.
8. Walter, A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), s.v. “Revelation, Special,” by Carl F. H. Henry.
9. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 113.
10. J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 87.
11. Packer, 52-53.
12. Packer, 86.
13. Other modes of special revelation which can be categorized as the word spoken were dreams, visions, and theophanies. Cf.

Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 44-48.
14. Packer, 81.
15. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 287. Quoted in Bernard Ramm, Special Revelation and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 111.
16. Ramm, 113.
17. Philip E. Hughes, "The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity," in D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 178.
18. See my article "Confident Belief: What Does It Mean To Know Truth?", Probe Ministries, 2001. Available on the Web at www.probe.org/confident-belief/.
19. See the above article.
20. Hughes, 183.

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"Why I Don't Believe in God"

Dear Christian Philosopher,

One day I was asked why I believed in God. I had a very hard time coming up with one reason. However, since my faith has disappeared, I have had a relatively easy time coming up with reasons that I do not believe in Him. Here are five:

- **I have not perceived God. Everything that I believe exists, I have perceived. As a result, I do not believe in God (since I don't believe that He exists).**
- **I have not received reliable testimony that anyone that**

has perceived God. However, I have received reliable testimony that others have not perceived God. Therefore, since I must perceive something (or at least hear reliable testimony from a perceiver) before I say it exists, I do not believe in God.

• I do not believe in God because he does not exist. God does not exist because everything that exists must take up space and God does not take up space. Therefore, God does not exist.

• It is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance. The Christian God is composed of spiritual substance and the world is material substance. The Christian God created the world. Since creating the world entails spiritual substance interacting with and manipulating physical substance, the Christian God cannot exist. (If spiritual substance can interact with physical substance, then how?)

• There is no such thing as spiritual substance (Descartes mind or the other realm); i.e., the soul, the devil, angels, hell etc. (If there is spiritual substance, then I would like to hear some reasons why I should believe that there is such a substance.). My reason for saying that there is no such thing as spiritual substance is due to spiritual substance being unperceivable and non-existent (assuming that to exist is to take up space). In fact, spiritual substance cannot be perceived because human-kinds faculties for perception only gather information from material substance. Since all human faculties are material, they cannot gather information from spiritual substance because the spiritual substance would have to interact with the material faculties; and it is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance.

Like I said, my faith disappeared. I believe that if someone shows me how I have made a mistake, then my faith will come

back. I know that these reasons are probably not great in the eyes of a seasoned philosopher (I am just doing my undergraduate work right now), but in my stage of development as a thinker, these are huge roadblocks. Thank you.

Dear _____,

Thanks for your letter. I will respond to each of your five points individually.

> *1. I have not perceived God. Everything that I believe exists, I have perceived. As a result, I do not believe in God (since I don't believe that He exists).*

By perceive, do you mean through the senses? If so, for this reason to be valid you must present a case for a strong empiricism such as that of the logical positivists of the early 20th century. They believed that only that can be held as true knowledge which is empirically verifiable. This has been shown to be self-referentially incoherent, since the theory itself can't be so verified. Consider, too, the things I'm sure you believe exist even though you haven't perceived them by your senses, things such as electricity or love. You can see the effects of these things, but not the things themselves (if love can be called a "thing"). Similarly, we can see the effects or the works of God without seeing Him. If you mean you haven't perceived God in any way, there is nothing I can say to that, except that this is no proof that God doesn't exist. It could be that you have closed off any avenues by which you might perceive Him.

> *2. I have not received reliable testimony that anyone that has perceived God. However, I have received reliable testimony that others have not perceived God. Therefore, since I must perceive something (or at least hear reliable testimony from a perceiver) before I say it exists, I do not believe in God.*

Again, by perceive do you mean by the senses? If so, my first

response still stands. If you mean any kind of perception, then millions of people can offer positive testimony. Of course, if you have decided already that God doesn't exist, then you will write such testimonies off to something else. But that would be no argument against God's existence, but rather a testimony of your own philosophical/religious biases.

> *3. I do not believe in God because he does not exist. God does not exist because everything that exists must take up space and God does not take up space. Therefore, God does not exist.*

Here you first need to present an argument to prove that anything which exists must take up space. Materialists have the same obligation as theists to prove their world view.

Here are some reasons I find naturalism untenable. Consider first that if matter is all that exists (since all existing things must take up space), then the universe must be explainable purely in terms of natural laws, including the law of cause and effect. If there is a purely materialistic cause/effect explanation for everything, then even our mental processes are nothing more than the motion of atoms in our brains (whether chemical or electrical) acting in a strict cause/effect sequence. But if this is the case, how can we know whether what we think is true, or whether it is just the result of determined natural processes? How do you know that what you think about the world outside yourself actually obtains? It could all be simply mental images your brain has produced. There must be something in our reasoning abilities which isn't reducible to natural processes.

In addition, such determinism strikes at the heart of free will, which means that you didn't make a free choice to write your letter: it simply happened as a result of the natural, non-mental, processes of your brain and body.

One more note: Those working in artificial intelligence still

haven’t been able to produce a computer which thinks like a human. If reason were a strictly causal process surely they would have been able to do so already.

> *4. It is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance. The Christian God is composed of spiritual substance and the world is material substance. The Christian God created the world. Since creating the world entails spiritual substance interacting with and manipulating physical substance, the Christian God cannot exist. (If spiritual substance can interact with physical substance, then how?)*

Why do you believe it is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance? Some say that such interaction would negate natural laws. But I see no reason to accept this. We can’t deny the interaction of the supernatural with the natural just because it complicates matters.

Just how this happens I cannot say. But my limited understanding shouldn’t be an impediment to belief. If we have good reasons to believe God exists and created the universe, and there are no objections significant enough to overcome those reasons, then one is justified in believing in God. Because there are other reasons to believe in God, the burden is on you to prove the spiritual cannot interact with the physical.

> *5. There is no such thing as spiritual substance (Descartes’ mind or ‘the other realm’); i.e., the soul, the devil, angels, hell etc. (If there is spiritual substance, then I would like to hear some reasons why I should believe that there is such a substance.). My reason for saying that there is no such thing as spiritual substance is due to spiritual substance being unperceivable and non-existent (assuming that to exist is to take up space). In fact, spiritual substance cannot be perceived because human-kind’s faculties for perception only gather information from material*

> *substance. Since all human faculties are material, they cannot gather information from spiritual substance because the spiritual substance would have to interact with the material faculties; and it is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance.*

You (again) make your presuppositions very clear: 1) all existing things take up space, and 2) the spiritual cannot interact with the material. Again, I ask that you present a case for your materialism and for your assumption about the impossibility of spiritual/natural interaction.

Here I have simply tried to respond to your ideas and show where I see weaknesses. For positive arguments to believe, there are numerous resources available. I suggest that you look for copies of C.S Lewis' books *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*. For a study on mind/body dualism from a Christian perspective, see J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), chapter 3. Also look through the list of articles on our web site (www.probe.org) under the categories Theology/Apologetics and World View/Philosophy. My articles on atheism and miracles address the issue of naturalism.

Rick Wade

Probe Ministries

"Is God the Creator of Evil?"

I would like to get some help with Isaiah 45:7, which says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." (KJV) Is God the creator of evil? Can you recommend a good book on this?

God is not the creator of evil. Indeed, strictly speaking, evil is not a thing. It doesn't exist in its own right, but only as a corruption or perversion of some good thing that God did create.

A better translation of this verse, given the context, is what you find at www.netbible.org:

> I am the one who forms light and creates darkness;
> the one who brings about peace and creates calamity.
> I am the Lord, who accomplishes all these things.

God is sovereign and nothing happens apart from His will (Ephesians 1:11; etc.). This includes calamities and disasters of every kind. Although God is not always the efficient cause of such calamities, He nonetheless allows them to occur in accordance with His sovereign purposes for the world. Almost any good exegetical or expositional commentary on this verse will deal with the difficulty you've noticed.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Elvis Has Left the Building

Elvis Lives!

Elvis lives. At least he does in the hearts of his fans. And they are everywhere.

Twenty-five years after his death, our culture is still fascinated with the raven-haired, swivel-hipped entertainer.

His songs fill the airwaves. His face graces postage stamps and velvet paintings in the U.S. and abroad. Thousands of the faithful annually trek to Graceland, his Memphis home, to pay homage to the king of rock and roll.

August 16, 2002, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Elvis Presley's death. Memphis will be rocking during "Elvis Week." Pilgrims can enjoy concerts and eat their favorite Elvis food (probably heavy on the grease and sugar).

Meanwhile, impersonators abound. For instance, the "Flying Elvi" jump from 13,000 feet. (You read correctly. That's the "Flying *Elvi*." Scholars and real Elvis fans know that "Elvi" is the plural of "Elvis." We've got culture here at Probe.)

Featured in a hit movie, these Las Vegas daredevils combine skydiving with Elvis nostalgia. They are even available for Las Vegas weddings: "Why settle for just one Elvis look-alike," asks the ad, "when you can have the entire ten-Elvi team in attendance on your special day?"

Internet sites tout Elvis fan clubs and even Elvis baby food. Wine connoisseurs have sighted "Always Elvis Wine." Former NFL coach Jerry Glanville often left two tickets for Elvis at the will-call window on game days.

Even academics are into Elvis. The University of Mississippi has held International Conferences on Elvis Presley. Scholarly seminars included, "Civil Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elvis;" "Elvis: The Twinless Twins' Search for Spiritual Meaning" (Elvis' twin brother died at birth); and "Elvis 'n' Jesus."

America. What a country!

What is all this about, really? Why the obsession with a long-dead rock and roll star? In this article we will examine some reasons for Elvis mania. You might think that Elvis fans are crazy! But I suspect that you share some of the desires and

hopes for life that seem to drive many of his fans. Their devotion borders on the spiritual. There is even a "First *Presley*terian Church."

What might all this fascination with Elvis tell us about ourselves? Let us look at some clues in the next section.

Inside the Mind of an Elvis Fan

An event manager from Washington, DC, got hooked on Elvis at a 1973 concert. She has a batch of Elvis memorabilia ranging from Elvis lamps – complete with swinging hips – to a Franklin Mint medal.

Her prized possession is a photocopy of Elvis' final EKG (electrocardiogram), obtained from a nurse who worked in the Memphis hospital where doctors desperately tried to revive his corpse in 1977. The photocopy may be quite valuable. Elvis fans can be weird, she admits.

The child of alcoholics, this self-confessed enabler has fantasies that if only she had encountered Elvis, maybe she could have rescued him from the drugs and despair that brought his demise.

She is sorry that Elvis had no one in his life that would hold him accountable for his actions. Instead, groupies, politicians, and doctors bowed before him, granting him adoration, access, and prescription medicine. Fame can be a powerful aphrodisiac and willing women were plentiful.

What fascinates her with Elvis after all these years? Could it be romance? Rescue needs or hopes? She is single. Adult children of alcoholics often find themselves rescuing people, just like they tried to help their addicted parents.

Might any chords in your soul resonate with this fan, or with the life and death of this poor southern boy turned rock superstar, whose posthumous career length now has surpassed

his live one? Most of us want to be loved. Some might envy Elvis' looks, voice, popularity, or fortune. Some, maybe many, are driven to obtain self-esteem by pleasing people.

Many feel that humans need to believe in something greater than themselves. Some have described this need as a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person. Could worshippers of Elvis – or of sports stars, rock stars, movie stars, or athletic heroes – be seeking to fill such a vacuum?

What do you make of the Elvis phenomenon? Is it a national joke, or could it hold important insights into human nature? Let us examine a variety of reactions.

What's the Elvis Craze All About?

Why does Elvis still fascinate people? What is the enduring Elvis craze about, really? My own informal, nonscientific survey yielded fascinating analyses from many levels of society.

"It's a national joke," claimed a San Diego housepainter.

A Miami office manager said, "Our cat is named Elvis Presley. He's fat with a black coat, white collar, and eyes that glaze over – Elvis in his later years." Her husband quipped, "The other day, we had an Elvis sighting – in a tree."

A Sacramento van driver attributes today's craze to "all the lonely people who sit around and watch TV." "Besides," the driver says, "Elvis' grave wasn't marked right, and there's evidence he's not really buried there. I read it in the tabloids."

A California mayor feels people need to link up with something, to create a sense of belonging. "They could be seeking memories of better times," she reasons. "Some people wish he was still alive. My husband is an Elvis fan," she says. "He knows Elvis is dead, but he likes the music."

A southern California doctor wonders if fans may be bonding with a romanticized part of their youth. He adds, “People who don’t have God make a god out of all sorts of things.”

Indeed they do. Deep reverence and even worship characterize many pilgrims to Graceland. Some hold candlelight ceremonies, offer flowers, and display icons.

One scholar at the University of Mississippi’s International Conference on Elvis noted, “without looking at spirituality, you can’t explain the Elvis phenomena. . . . There’s a tremendous force that brings people back to Graceland.”{1}

Spiritual matters, of course, can be very controversial. More and more psychologists and psychiatrists emphasize the need to develop the total person – physically, emotionally and spiritually – in order to achieve a healthy life. Spiritual questions surface in many areas of society, from talk shows to hospitals.

Oprah Winfrey leads the pack of talk show hosts delving into the spiritual dimension. Respectable medical schools like Duke, Harvard, and Columbia study faith’s impact on health.

Perhaps there is a spiritual void that Elvis worshipers and many others seek to fill with the objects of their devotion. Could that explain the Elvis phenomenon? Next we will consider the spiritual implications of Elvis worship.

Are You Lonesome Tonight?

Tell me now, really: Are You Lonesome Tonight? (Don’t worry; I won’t quote the whole song . . . at least not in this article!) Read what these Elvis fans have to say.

“I can get so depressed,” admitted a Texas woman. “Anytime I’ve got anything bothering me, I can get in my car and turn the stereo on and listen to Elvis and just go into a world of my own. . . . It’s like he’s right there singing directly to

me. . . . It's like he's always there to solve everything."{2}

"I sit and talk to him," claimed a New Jersey follower. "I feel he hears what I say to him and he gives me the will to go on when things are really bad. . . . Somehow you talk to Elvis. . . . I know if anybody ever saw me, they would probably tell me that I was crazy, but I do . . . I love him, I talk to him and I know he understands and I feel so much better after. I think I always will."{3}

End of quote, I should emphasize. That was me quoting somebody else, folks, in case you began reading in mid-sentence.

Some fringers actually believe Elvis is still alive. My informal survey encountered no actual Elvis spotters, though a few claimed they had seen the Energizer Bunny.

Is the Elvis craze simply a zany fad? Or does it indicate something deeper about human longings? Some seek happiness through success, wealth, or relationships. Probably everyone has at least one "Elvis" in his or her life: a person, idea, team, goal, or possession that inspires the devotion and quest for fulfillment.

But human-based searches for ultimate happiness can be risky. For most of us, there will always be someone richer, more intelligent or articulate, better looking or more popular than we. Our teams will lose; our heroes will have flaws. Even if you reach the top . . .what then? Latest statistics show the death rate is still 100%. Is there something more?

You may not realize that Elvis' only Grammy Award for a single came for his 1974 recording of "How Great Thou Art," a famous hymn. The lyrics, which likely reflected his own spiritual roots, point to hope beyond human accomplishment. Next, we will look at how the message of this song might help meet the longings common to Elvis fans and to us all.

Someone Greater than Elvis

Merchants continue to cash in on Elvis' popularity. You can buy "Barbie Loves Elvis" doll sets and Elvis mouse pads. Tupelo, Mississippi (Elvis' birthplace) boasts an Elvis McDonalds.

The Elvis craze sometimes borders on worship, with fans seeking spiritual fulfillment in their departed king.

Many people, though, not just Elvis fans, feel a spiritual emptiness, a need to connect with something greater to replace inner loneliness with friendship, fear with love, and desperation with hope.

I will not enter the debate about Elvis' personal spiritual convictions. But again consider the message of his only Grammy- winning single, the famous hymn "How Great Thou Art." The lyrics speak in "awesome wonder" of the universe as a majestic display of God's power.

The biblical God alluded to in this song is described elsewhere as a friend of those in need. "The Lord is my shepherd," wrote an Israeli king. "I have everything I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths."{4}

If we allow Him into our lives, this God promises to be our friend, both when things are going well and when we are painfully lonely.

"How Great Thou Art" tells that this loving God sent His Son to die, to carry the burden of humanity's injustices, selfishness, and wrongs.

God's love is endless, and He offers us hope. When we tell Him our problems, unlike Elvis, He can do something about them. Not only can we rely on Him for our needs today, but the

biblical documents promise eternal freedom from death, sorrow, crying, and pain.{5} Jesus Himself promised, "I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned . . . but they have already passed from death into life.{6}

Friendships, love, and hope – from one who cannot fail us. Sounds great. But is it true?

Jesus backed up His claims by rising from the dead. As somewhat of a skeptic, I examined evidences for the resurrection of Jesus and found it to be one of the best-attested facts in history.{7}

Elvis Presley is dead. Some therapists encourage their clients to get in touch with their "Inner Elvis." As the world commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of his passing, perhaps it would be more fruitful to look beyond our "Inner Elvis" to Someone greater.

Adapted from an article that first appeared in *Pursuit* magazine, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1997.

Notes

1. Gregory Rumberg, "I Know Your Elvis," *Contemporary Christian Music,* February 1997, 31.

2. Ralph Burns, "How Great Thou Art: Photographs from Graceland," California Museum of Photography, University of California Riverside Web site: http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/elvis/burns_intro.html, 1996.

3. Ibid.

4. Psalm 23:1-3, NLT.

5. Revelation 21: 1,4.

6. John 5:24, NLT.

7. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict,* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

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Thanksgiving Roots

We live in an uncertain moment in history when everyone is looking for "Roots." November, especially, is a time to reflect upon family and traditions. Curiously, we Christians tend to be strangers to what is best in our own tradition. I refer to the Puritans, the historic source of our Thanksgiving heritage and much of what is still good about America.

We can still feel today the impact and the echoes of this robust community upon our own lives—in family, in work, in education, in economics, in worship, and in national destiny. But let them speak for themselves:

On the God-Centered Life: "I was now grown familiar with the Lord Jesus Christ; he would oft tell me he loved me. I did not doubt to believe him; if I went abroad, he went with me, when I returned he came home with me. I talked with him upon my way, he lay down with me, and usually I did awake with him: and so sweet was his love to me, as I desired nothing but him in heaven or earth." —John Winthrop.

On the Sacred and the Secular: “Not only my spiritual life, but even my civil life in this world, all the life I live, is by the faith of the Son of God: he exempts no life from the agency of faith.” –John Cotton.

On God and the Commonplace: “Have you forgot. . .the milkhouse, the stable, the barn and the like, where God did visit your soul?” –John Bunyan.

On Spiritual Vitality: “Therefore the temper of the true professor is. . . to advance his religion. . .In the cause of Christ, in the course of religion, he must be fiery and fervent.” –Richard Sibbes.

On the Centrality of the Bible: “The word of God must be our rule and square whereby we are to frame and fashion all our actions; and according to the direction received thence, we must do the things we do, or leave them undone.” –William Perkins.

On the Family: “The great care of my godly parents was to bring me up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord: whence I was kept from many visible outbreakings of sin which else I had been guilty of: and whence it was that I had many good impressions of the Spirit of God upon me, even from my infancy.” –Cotton Mather.

The Puritans viewed themselves as pilgrims on a journey to God and heaven. That journey led through this world and was not an escape from it. The Puritans saw themselves as participants in a great spiritual battle between good and evil, God and Satan. As warfaring and wayfaring Christians, they were assured of victory because they were on God’s side.

Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and many other colonial universities were originally founded for the express purpose of propagating these principles. Perhaps these universities would still be for us objects of thanksgiving rather than uneasiness if the substance of Christian thought which

characterized their historic beginnings was still primary in their philosophies and curricula.

But there are still glimmers here and there. And herein is our great task and challenge for the new century: to rekindle the fires and recapture the spirit of the Puritan lifestyle which was fed by the spiritual springs of new life in Christ. These are roots worth searching for this Thanksgiving. Maya the Lord find each of us diligently seeking to find and emulate them.

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"Why Didn't God Just Not Create the People Who Wouldn't Believe in Him?"

I have a question about God's omniscience versus the existence of hell. I know the Bible says (and I believe it) that God is good and loving, as well as holy and just. It also says that He is omniscient, knowing the end from the beginning, and knowing from eternity-past the choice that every human being that ever lived/will live will make – either to accept His offer of eternal life, or to reject it.

If both of these statements are true and biblical, my question is this: If God knew (even before creation) that millions of people would make the choice to reject Him (and thus end up in hell by their own choice), why did He simply not create them in the first place? I know this might sound simplistic, but why would He create all of those people who would ultimately reject Him and end up in hell, if He KNEW that would be their final and eternal destination? (A non-Christian friend of mine

calls it “a cruel joke.”)

This is a tough question. I was tempted to write back and say, “We just don’t know,” and ultimately that’s probably true. “Why” questions are about motives, and unless someone tells us, it’s awfully hard to read another person’s mind. . . especially God’s! But as I thought more about it, I realized that I COULD pass on the observation that our choice is a precious thing to God because choice is the foundation for true love. If God didn’t create the people who wouldn’t choose Him, then that would be the equivalent of removing the choice.

At any rate, He did, and He knows what He’s doing, and I guess we just need to trust Him.

I think we need to see the Lord as reluctantly letting people choose hell instead of gleefully sending them there. He doesn’t want ANYONE to perish (2 Peter 3:9), but some insist on it. That’s not cruel on His part, it’s a way of supporting our choices.

Nonetheless, the bottom line is that it’s a mystery. Non-believers aren’t going to trust His heart when they don’t trust anything about Him in the first place, are they?

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and

Children?”

I am a Christian and spend time talking with others often about God, but I have been speechless when they bring up the issue, for example, in I Samuel 15:1-3 where God tells His people to destroy the men and the women and children as well. This is difficult to see that as part of His character. Is that a just God? What was He thinking?? I understand that the Amalekites ambushed them when travelling from Egypt but why the women and children?? I would really appreciate your reply. Thank you.

This is indeed a question often asked by critics of the Bible. It is a legitimate question and one that deserves a comprehensive, complete and, hopefully, acceptable answer. So let me see if I can address it.

One of the most important rules of Hermeneutics (the task of interpretation, meaning of a verse or passage of Scripture) is to observe the *context* of what you are seeking to interpret correctly. This is crucial in seeking to answer this question you have raised. We need to see clearly the historical background and the situation which called for such severe measures to be taken.

Who were the Canaanites?

Canaan, the Bible tells us, was the fourth son of Ham, who was one of the three sons of Noah. The use of the word “Canaan” stems from the fact that Canaan’s descendants populated the land which was later called Palestine, and now is called Israel. Modern Syria is also included and it is roughly the same land which God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21; Numbers 34:1-12).

The Amalekites which you mentioned were one of several tribes which are often referred to collectively as either Canaanites or Phoenicians. Their language was either Ugaritic or

Phoenician, two Semitic dialects close to the Hebrew dialect. Other major "Canaanite" tribes included the Amorites, Jebusites, Hivites, Girgasites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Moabites. The Phoenicians were a sea-faring people who lived along the Mediterranean Coast. They also had colonies which included Cypress, Sardinia, and Carthage.

What were their Religious beliefs and practices?

Archaeology has given us substantial material about these people, and particularly from their capital city, Ugarit. Thousands of clay tablets have been recovered from Ras Shamra in northern Syria, including the libraries of two great temples dating from the 15th-14th century B.C. Much of this epic literature has to do with their religious practices and their pantheon of gods. Merrilll F. Unger notes that Canaanite cultic practices were more base than any other place in the ancient Near East. (*Unger's Bible Dictionary,* p.172). Let me list some of the features of their religious beliefs and practices.

The Canaanite Pantheon (of gods)

A full description of the Canaanite gods has been provided by C. R. Driver, who translated the Ras Shamra tablets found in the ancient city of Ugarit.

El
The head of the Canaanite pantheon. El was generally a rather remote and shadowy figure, but sometimes stepped down from his eminence and became the hero of exceedingly "earthy" myths. He is described as living at a great distance ("a thousand plains, ten thousand fields,") from Canaan, and to this remote spot the gods invariably had to travel when they wished to consult him.

El was called the "father of years," the "father of man," and also the "father bull," i.e. the progenitor of all the gods. He is likened to a bull in the midst of a herd of cows and

calves. According to the text, El had three wives: Astarte (goddess of the evening star), Asherah (goddess of the sea and consort to Baal), and Baaltis—all three his sisters. He is a brutal, bloody tyrant, whose acts caused all the gods to be terrified by his decisions. For example, he dethroned his own father ("Heaven, Uranus") and castrated him; he killed his own favorite son, "Iadid," and cut off his daughter's head. The tablets also portray El as seducing two women, whose names are not mentioned, and he allows them to be driven into the desert after the birth of two children, "Dawn" (shahru) and "Sunset" (shalmu). W. F. Albright in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages, XXXV,* comments that the description of the act of seduction of these two women is one of the frankest and most sensuous in ancient Near-Eastern literature.

Baal and Mot

Baal is the great storm-god. He brings the rain, and announces his present with thunder and lightning and, most important of all, the needed rain which would insure a good harvest. He became the reigning king of the gods, and was enthroned on a lofty mountain in the far northern heavens, but faithfully reappears each year to sustain the people. Mot, whose name means "death," represents the god of "drought" and "sterility." In the myth, he is Baal's chief and continual antagonist. Even Baal must yield to Mot when his time (of the year) comes. When Mot comes, Baal's time is over and he is ordered to take everything connected with him down into the depths of the earth:

> "And you, take your clouds,
> Your wind, your storm, your rains!
> With you take Padriya daughter of the stream.
> With you take Tatalliya daughter of rain."(67:v:6-11)

The situation could hardly be more clearly described: the season of drought has come, the rain and the clouds have vanished; the streams have dried up and the vegetation languishes. But before Baal descends into the earth, however,

he

> *"Makes love to a heifer in Debir,*
> *A young cow in the fields of Shimmt.*
> *He lies with her seventy-seven times—*
> *Yea, he copulates eighty-eight times—*
> *So she conceives and bears a child."(76:v;18-22)*

Anath
The goddess of fertility. She was considered a divine prostitute. She is represented as a naked woman in the prime of life, standing on a lion, with a lily in one hand and a serpent or two in the other. Often two rams are present to portray her sexual vigor. The female organs are always accentuated.

It is important to bear in mind that these "myths" were ritualistically enacted. Therefore we can assume that ritual bestiality was practiced by the priesthood, and temple prostitution was practiced by the adherents (priestesses) of the Anath fertility cult. Cyrus Gordan has written "that it was no crime for men to copulate with animals in Ugarit is indicated by the fact that…Baal impregnated a heifer…a myth…enacted ritually by reputable priests… Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Hebrews' pagan neighbors practiced bestiality (Lev. 18:24) as we now know to be literally true from the Ugaritic documents" (Ugaritic Literature, p. 8).

With Baal's seasonal death, his father, El, the chief god, goes into mourning. El descends from his throne and sits in sackcloth and ashes on the ground. He lacerates himself, making cuts on his face, arms chest and back (cf. I Kings 18:28):

> "Dead is Baal, the Overcomer
> Absent is the Prince, Lord (Baal) of the Earth (67:VI:9,10)
> He pours the ashes of grief on his head.
> The dust of mourning on his pate;

> For clothing, he is covered with sackcloth,
> He roams the mountain in mourning:
> He mutilates his face and beard.
> He lacerates his forearms.
> He plows his chest like a garden.
> He lacerates his back like a valley
> He lifts his voice and shouts: 'Baal is dead!'
> Woe to the people, Woe to the multitudes of Baal
> I shall go down into the earth." (67:VI:15-24)

Anath, Baal's consort, repeats this cry and copies El's self-mutilation.

How does God, the Bible, portray the Canaanites? The clearest and most comprehensive biblical assessment of the Canaanites is found in Leviticus 18:1-5:

> "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do *what is done in the land of Canaan* where I am bringing you; *you shall not walk in their statutes* (ways). You are to perform My judgments and keep my statutes, to live in accord with them. I am the Lord your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord."

By inference, everything forbidden in this chapter is simply a description of what the Canaanites were doing. First on the list of forbidden practices is incest, sexual intercourse with blood relatives and in-laws: your father and mother (v.7,8), your sister (v. 9), your daughter (v. 10), your niece (v. 11), your aunt (v.12, 13), your uncle (v.15), your sister-in-law (v.16), any woman or her children (17), polygamy (two sisters-v.18), adultery (your neighbor's wife-v. 20), ritual child sacrifice (v.21), homosexuality, sodomy (v.22), bestiality (animals-v. 23). God summarizes these prohibitions with:

“Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and my judgments, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you; for the men of the land who have been before you have done ALL these abominations, and the land has become defiled; so that the land may not spew you out should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God.” (Lev. 18:24-30).

God’s Purpose and Intent

What we observe above is in stark contrast to the cultic practices of the Canaanites, the high standards and expectations of conduct laid out by the God of Israel for His people. Why is it so important that the Israelites shun these practices of the indigent population, the Canaanites?

Because God is doing something new, something important. He has redeemed his chosen people from Egyptian bondage and is in the process of fulfilling his ancient promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12. The larger plan involves an earlier promise (Genesis 3:15) that there would come a “Seed of the Woman” who would crush Satan and establish a means to undo the damage done in Eden through their disobedience. This plan of redemption is promised, and the remainder of the Old Testament is a working out in history the unfolding of that plan to provide a Savior, a Redeemer, a Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise.

And in Abraham God found a worthy servant who would become the patriarch, the father of a nation through whom Messiah would come, bringing untold blessing and deliverance through his life, death, and resurrection to all those who believe. Redemptive history is a long process. It began in Eden immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, and it will one day end in the New Jerusalem.

God's peculiar people begin with Abraham and his immediate descendants: first Isaac, then Jacob, and then Joseph. These four were the founders, the patriarchs of this new people God was shaping to be the vehicle through which Messiah would come. The Israelites then spent four hundred years in bondage in Egypt until Moses was raised up to deliver them with "a strong hand." Pharaoh finally let them go. They traveled to Mt. Sinai and stayed there a full year. They arrived at Sinai a disorganized mob; they left there a year later an organized host. During that year God revealed to them the constitutional foundations of their heritage and their mission. He spelled out the rules of their conduct, their worship, and how they would live in community. At the end of this year, they were poised east of the Jordan and ready to go into Canaan and take it by force. But after spying out the land, the fear of the majority with respect to this campaign caused them to shrink back from their task, and God sent them into the wilderness to wander for forty years. The new generation that emerged at the close of this period of divine discipline was finally allowed to go into the Canaan and possess it.

As they prepared themselves for this task, Moses summarized for a second time (the book of Deuteronomy) just what it would take, and what they would have to do. Ironically, the issue of the Canaanites is first spoken of way back in Genesis 15! God is speaking to Abraham and He mentions the problem of the Canaanites. He first speaks of (predicts) the Egyptian bondage which would come, and then He speaks of the deliverance from Egypt, and then He promises the conquest and repossession of

the Promised Land. He says:

> Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions… And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then, in the fourth generation they shall return here (Canaan) *for the iniquity of the Amorite (Canaanites) is not yet* ***complete*** (Gen. 15:12-16).

What is interesting about this is that the wickedness of the Canaanites is already recognized as a problem 400+ years before God will give the command that the Canaanites are to be slaughtered—men, women, and children! At the time the Lord spoke these words to Abraham (c. 2,000 B.C.), the Canaanites were already corrupt, but they still had a way to go before God, who is a patient, merciful but Holy God, would finally bring judgment upon them. God gave them 400 years to "shape up," but we find them even more wicked than ever when the Israelites are about to invade (retake) their land!

What is also interesting is that when Jericho was about to be taken, Rahab the prostitute hid the two Israeli spies in her home, lied to the authorities about it, and then helped the spies escape over the wall. While the spies were in her home she said some remarkable things:

> "She came up to them on the roof and said to them, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the Amorites whom you utterly destroyed beyond the Jordan… And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord, your God, He is God in

> heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the Lord, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with me…and deliver our lives from death." (Joshua 2:8-13)

Not only Rahab knew of God's powerful deliverance; she tells us that everyone else knew about these events and were fearful for their lives! The difference between Rahab and the rest of the people of Jericho is that she saw in these mysterious workings none other than the hand of the true God Himself! She repented; she believed! Because of her faith, she is mentioned in Faith's Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11:31)! My point is that other Canaanites could have responded as she did. Unfortunately, they continued on in their wicked, rebellious ways. The fullness of the "Amorites" is now complete. National judgment is at hand, with Israel as the instrument God will use to put an end to a totally depraved culture.

Why Such Excessive Slaughter? Why the Women? Why the Children?

God explains this to us in Romans 1:17-2:2:

> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.
>
> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
>
> Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an *image* in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their

> hearts to *impurity*, that their bodies might be *dishonored* among them. For they exchanged the *truth of God* for a lie, and worshipped and served the *creature* rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.
>
> For this reason God *gave them over* to *degrading* passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is *unnatural*, and in the same way also the men *abandoned* the natural function of the woman and *burned in their desire* towards one another, *men with men* committing *indecent acts* and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.
>
> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God *gave them over* to a *depraved mind*, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, *haters of God*, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, with out understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and though they know the ordinance of God, that *those who practice such things are* ***worthy of death***, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.
>
> Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you…and we know that the judgment of God *rightfully falls upon those who practice such things.*"

The Romans passage above describes for us in vivid detail how this can happen to a culture. And this is exactly the kind of conditions existing in Canaan as the Israelites approached to conquer the land which had been promised them. God makes it very clear to them the reasons for what they must do and how they must do it:

> "Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to

> go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you… Know therefore today that *it is the Lord your God who is crossing over* before you as a *consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you,* so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you.
>
> Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of *my* righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is because of the wickedness of these nations* that the Lord is dispossessing them before you… It is not for *your* righteousness or for the uprightness of *your* heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the *wickedness of these nations* that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order *to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*
>
> Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn (stiff necked) people!" (Deuteronomy 9:1-6)

God makes it very clear that sometimes things deteriorate so far that a culture or a people reaches a "point of no return." The remedy is like trying to unscramble an egg. There is just no way back; things have gone too far. The story of the Genesis Flood is "Exhibit One"—a demonstration that He has already done this once on this planet. A good surgeon does not amputate a leg if someone has a severely stubbed toe. But a good surgeon will amputate if the infection is so massive that to refuse to do so would mean the loss of the whole body and person.

R.A. Torrey remarks: "It is appalling that any people should be utterly put to the sword, but it is even more appalling that a society of people should have become so corrupt and

debased that such treatment is deemed necessary in the interest of humanity. The Canaanites were a moral cancer threatening the very life of the whole human race. The cancer had to be removed in order to save the body, just as a surgeon inflicts pain and suffering in order to remove a malignant growth in the body (*Difficulties in the Bible.* R.A. Torrey, p. 47).

This is exactly the dilemma God faced as the Israelites are brought back to possess their land. To settle them in the midst of these depraved people is asking for disaster. If the cancer remains, Israel will not survive. For Israel's survival, the Canaanites will have to go. Israel will be corrupted by their presence and their influence. She will fall away from the Lord Who has loved her and delivered her. Ironically, this is exactly what happened, because while they disposed of most of the inhabitants of Canaan, *they did not remove all of them.* And Israel's incomplete obedience in this matter actually brought about future, periodic relapses when they *did* cease "following the Lord" and served other gods through the ongoing influence of these pagan tribes.

With respect to the women, the experience of Lot, his wife, and his two daughters dwelling in Sodom is instructive. We are told that if ten righteousness men could have been found in the city, God would spare it from judgment. Judgment fell on the city, indicating ten were not found. Lot was "courting disaster" to be a believer and live in such an environment. As the account indicates, Lot survived the judgment because God graciously warned him to flee the city (this was really based upon God's honoring Abraham's intercession on Lot's behalf), but his wife turned around and looked back toward Sodom. This was her home. She liked Sodom. The immorality didn't bother her. She was still yearning for Sodom when God turned her into a pillar of salt. In some instances, the women are the "prime-movers" in leading the men into sin. Torrey comments: "Though true women are nobler than true men, depraved women are more

dangerous than depraved men” (p. 48).

The two daughters were also affected. They had sense enough not to turn around and look at the city, but we find in their immoral, incestuous behavior with their own father later that they were already “damaged goods.” This is a good warning for Christian parents. We may choose to live in or near “Sodom” and we ourselves may survive, but it is more than likely our children will not come away unaffected by their exposure to such an unwholesome environment.

With respect to the command to dispose of the children, there is at least one bright spot, severe as it is. Those who adopt children want to do so at the earliest possible age. Why? Because evidence shows that children are early affected by whatever their family system might be. The emotional and physical abuse and wounds inflicted upon them from birth to age five or six leave permanent scars which often cannot be healed. The scars remain, and even the best of environments cannot overcome the negative influences of those early years of development. Even these Canaanite children would have perpetuated the corrupt influence of the Canaanites among the Hebrew Community, had they been spared.

We have all observed or known of families which are so dysfunctional and corrupt we grieve for their unhappy, confused, and suffering children, and wish to God somehow they could be removed and placed in some loving, caring home where they could feel safe and not suffer at the hands of hostile and even deranged parents. Happily, there are no children in hell. Jesus loves the little children. The one bright spot in this sordid story is that God removed an entire generation of Canaanite children and took them to such a home . . . His home.

Those who struggle the most with the forceful elimination of the Canaanites in this biblical account have a very dim and truncated view of God. We have seen above that God has the

right, because of His holiness and His righteousness, to visit judgment upon individuals and nations who have become corrupt and degenerate. The amazing thing is, like with the Canaanites, that He waits so long. Torrey remarks,

> "…Those who regard sin lightly and who have no adequate conception of God's holiness will always find insurmountable difficulty in this command of God, but those who have come to see the awfulness of sin and have learned to hate it with the infinite hate it deserves, and who have caught some glimpses of the infinite holiness of God and have been made in some measure partakers of that holiness, will, after mature reflection, have no difficulty whatever with this command. It is consciousness of sin in our own hearts and lives that makes us rebel against God's stern dealings with sin (p. 50)."

I hope this in some way helps to address your question, _____.

God Bless.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries